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COUNTRY Soviet Union

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SUBJECT Vorkuta Labor Camp

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1. [redacted] recently released from the Vorkuta camp in Siberia. One is a woman journalist who was sentenced to fifteen years' exile in 1948 for "espionage". The other is an [redacted] merchant who, with his wife, was given a like sentence on the same charge in 1951. Both were unexpectedly released in Nov 1953, and returned to Germany by different routes. [redacted]

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2. The Soviet forced labor system has completely changed since 1948, as compared with the time before. Whether the prisoner worked or not, he received a basic ration of 800 grams of bread. For working he received a special ration, depending upon fulfilling the work norm. He was also paid for the work. The number of prisoners is estimated, [redacted] by other experienced camp inmates, at 20 to 30 millions in the whole Soviet Union. The first wave of inmates after 1945 was made up of Eastern workers, all of whom were sentenced to 15 years apiece. Their number is estimated at 2,500,000. The second wave was made up of part of the inhabitants of the area occupied by the Germans during the war, of whom Ukrainians constituted an overwhelming majority. In 1948 there were mass arrests of students and "komsomols" in the Soviet Union. In that same year a revolutionary organization called "Istynnoye Delo Lenina" ("Lenin's True Work") was formed at the University of Moscow. This illegal group, to which the sons of known Soviet bureaucrats belonged, was especially strong at the university. The wave of camp inmates of this kind was later added to by the anti-Semitic measures which sent thousands of Jewish intellectuals to the camps in Siberia. Another entirely different group was made up of members of the Ukrainian resistance.

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of whom there were 3,000 at Vorkuta alone. The prisoners are conscious that they are not only the objects of political repression, but that they are regarded by the government as an important economic factor and as cheap labor power for the exploitation of Siberia's enormous resources. The raising of living conditions among the prisoners also has the purpose of increasing the capacities of the penal camp inmates and obtaining larger results through larger portions and higher pay. In 1948 all criminals were transferred from the labor camps to so-called "general camps". When it is remembered how this element was a special source for the spy system in the camps, and by its behavior a plague to the political prisoners, its removal must be regarded as an important alleviation for the camp inmates.

3. The head of the Vorkuta camp administration is now the MVD General Derevianko. The commander of the "general camp" in Vorkuta is the MVD (Soviet Secret Police) Colonel Kuchtikov. In the course of the enormous expansion of the forced labor system, all so-called "free living" inhabitants were removed from Vorkuta in 1948, so that now only prisoners and guards with their families live there. The situation is the same at Karaganda, Kolyma, and other places.
4. The greatest political influence among the political prisoners has been the IDL (Istynnoye Dielo Lenina). This organization first of all unifies the intellectual leadership of the transportees. It is interesting that the core of this revolutionary movement consists, not of old Communist prisoners, but of the younger Soviet generation: students, "komsomols," and officers of the army. The most active element is composed of the students of the University of Moscow. The members of the IDL are anti-Stalinists. They believe that the greatest evil of the Soviet Union's development is the dictatorship of the Party machine. The further development and progress of the Soviet Union mean a struggle against dictatorship. The state's range of authority must be liquidated accordingly. Also the Communist Party must not be permitted to have a monopoly of arranging the production program. It is only the political school and the smithy of new ideas. The controlling and deciding historical factor must be the workingman as such. The interesting statement occurred repeatedly in talk: "Astonishingly, the IDL demands exactly what Djilas and Yugoslavia demand." Because the ideas of Djilas make no allowance for Yugoslavia's economic conditions, they are premature, but they formed the main subject of the discussions and theoretical debates of the intellectual section of the transportees at Vorkuta. The most interesting thing is what took place in the IDL organization after Stalin's death. When the IDL leaders found that the "small-souled bureaucrat" Malenkov proposed to link up directly with Lenin through the criminal Stalin crowd, they decided to change the name of the organization, in the fall of 1953, from IDL to "Soyuz Syndykatov." The revolutionary leadership in Vorkuta believed that such a name best reflected the future development of Soviet society. Neither the state nor the Party, but the free associations of producers on the basis of an industrial economy would be the decisive factor in the future economic and political development of the Soviet people.
5. The "Believers" formed another group of camp inmates. In the women's camp they were known as "monashki" ("nuns"), but in the men's camp as "believers." Their situation had changed radically since 1948. Up to that time they were consistently ridden by the camp administration, but now the "Believers" no longer are required

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to work outside the camp. Because the Soviet state is for them a work of Satan, they refuse to perform any kind of labor. They were a real problem for the camp authority. Finally however the administration found a compromise. The "Believers" work only in their barracks for their fellow members. They work a third of the day; the other two-thirds they spend in praying and copying the gospels. The "Believers" have thousands of secret channels through which they are skilled in distributing these copied-down excerpts of the gospels in all the languages of the Soviet Union, not only among the camp inmates but throughout all Siberia. The guards' families also read these writings in secret. The "Believers" in the present prison camps have nothing in common with previous religious sects in the Soviet Union. They are a small part of a great spontaneous religious movement which has arisen in the Soviet Union since the war. New prisoners of this kind arrive in camp continuously. They reject all confessions and organizations. The Gospel for them is the all-embracing stream.

6. The Ukrainians form another special camp group. They are commonly known as "Banderovzi" or "Povstanz" ("Rebels"). Both informants agreed that the Ukrainian group is especially well organized. When 800 Ukrainians came to Vorkuta from Karaganda in Apr 1953 they marched into camp singing their war songs. Immediately after their arrival they demanded the removal of a small remainder of criminal prisoners. In Karaganda the Ukrainians had killed 160 of these criminals in the course of a night. After that the authorities no longer ventured to put Ukrainians and criminals together. Their solution was to break up the Ukrainian camp at Karaganda and distribute them to other parts of the Soviet Union.
7. On the other hand, the Ukrainians are mostly peasant class youths, hardly at all intellectual. Because the only way for them to improve their condition is by work, the Ukrainians turn out more than all the others. This brings them into conflict with the members of the IDL, whose motto is to work slowly. One of source's informants is of a different opinion however. In his opinion the Ukrainians since their arrival at Vorkuta have been a strong influence in the relaxing of camp labor discipline. They throttled two brutal work overseers, and since then even the guards have been for a "ca' canny" working practice. It is remarked that while the Ukrainian group (who are mostly West Ukrainians) are in favor of independence for the Ukraine, their program appears to be a completely democratic one, even probably in the Soviet sense. They are against a return to large land ownership and capitalism; they talk about a classless society; they only want liberty and equality for their homeland. The leaders of the Ukrainians were greatly pleased when Petrovsky, the old national Communist leader, was reinstated by the Kremlin. They said: "At last we have a right man in the Kremlin. Although he is a Communist, he is Western-minded and no favorer of the Great Russinas."
8. After Beria's arrest a regular rebellion occurred at Vorkuta and the leaders of the IDL (Syndical Union) and the Ukrainians united in a common program for the immediate release of all political prisoners. They declared themselves ready to stay five years at Vorkuta as free volunteers in order, in this way, to make possible adequate economic measures for the further exploitation of the natural resources. The camp authorities tried at first to convince the prisoners that their strike was senseless. But they promised various betterments, which in fact were carried out: daily letter writing, unlimited receipt of packages, reduction of roll calls to one a day, removal of the barred windows of the camp barracks. The conciliatory measures of the administration were ineffectual, however, all the more so as the prisoners stood on the proclaimed changes in the punishment code. The strike, which had steadily gained strength until it resembled open rebellion, finally was suppressed bloodily at the end of Nov 1953 when the camp commander, General Derevianko, received reinforcements. One hundred fifty prisoners were shot.

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